



**ASIAN EXPERIENCE IN PROTECTED AREA
CO-MANAGEMENT:
INITIAL RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CTFR PROJECT**

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Co-Management of Tropical Forest Resources in Bangladesh (CTFR) Project

ASIAN EXPERIENCE IN PROTECTED AREA CO-MANAGEMENT: INITIAL RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CTFR PROJECT

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Introduction

In accordance with the Statements of Work for the subject assignment,¹ the Consultants visited Dhaka from 15-19 September 2003 to assist with a presentation to the Forestry Department on co-management principles and practice based on Asian experience. In this assignment, the Consultants worked most closely Philip DeCosse of the Co-Management of Tropical Forest Resources (CTFR) Project team but also interacted with senior officials of the Forest Department (FD) and the USAID/Dhaka Environment SO6 Team.

This brief Report summarizes the activities conducted and presents preliminary recommendations for preparation of the project work plan, with special emphasis on policy and institutional development. It begins with a summary of the briefings provided in accordance with the Consultants' Statements of Work. The Report then goes on to provide suggestions regarding considerations in the development of policies and institutions for protected areas (PA) management as well as opportunities for learning from and sharing with other Asian countries struggling with similar issues. Special emphasis is given to opportunities for sharing with and benefitting from Indian experiences.

Asian Experience with Co-management of Protected Areas

In preparation for the assignment, the Consultants reviewed experience from Asia with participatory approaches to management of parks and protected areas. This primarily centered on the experience of the three countries: Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India. The findings and impressions are drawn from more than 10 years of experience by the East-West Center with research and training in this field (on the part of Dr. McCauley) and more than 20 years of experience in Indian wildlife management and protected area management within the Indian Forest Service (on the part of Mr. Palit). The main points of relevance from this experience were shared with the project team in Dhaka and used as inputs to a presentation at the FD.

The FD presentation (shown in Annex 2 to this document) placed emphasis on key developments in the area of co-management over the past 20 years, with reference to the outcomes of the just-completed World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa.

Summary of Major Briefings

On September 16th, briefings were given for the members of the CTFR Project team, including

- i) Matihar Rahaman, Sr. Programme Manager, RDRS
- ii) Utpal Dutta, Sr. Manager, Community Development Centre (CODEC)
- iii) Md. Haresul Islam, Sr. Programme Manager, RDRS
- iv) Mr. Nazmul, Caritas Fisheries Program; and,
- v) Philip DeCosse, Chief of Party of the CTFR Project.

On September 17th, 2003, briefings by the Consultants were made to the Forest Department staff members concerning co-management in India and the sub-region.

¹ See Annex 1 for the Statements of Work of the two authors.

The FD presentation (see Annex 2 below) was made by the Consultants on September 18th, 2003, and included extensive examples from the Indian experience with social forestry and protected areas management, and lessons learned from Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

A discussion on the difficulties but importance of getting good interdisciplinary data on the pressures facing the selected PAs also was held subsequent to this presentation. In order to adequately understand the sustainability of alternative management approaches, the current resource extraction patterns must be well documented. If their sustainability is to be assessed, and equally well informed assessment must be made of the resilience of the forest ecosystem to the identified extraction patterns (including potentially complex flora-fauna linkages). Expertise will be needed in social sciences and forest ecology to accomplish this analysis.

Policy and Institutional Framework for Protected Areas (PAs) Management

Bangladesh is clearly an extreme case with respect to the population pressures affecting its efforts to develop and maintain a national system of protected areas. The levels of rural poverty prevalent in the regions surrounding most of the country's PAs argue strongly for use of a co-management approach as the only viable and equitable means for accomplishing their sustainable management.

The country also is starting from a very weak institutional base with regard to biodiversity conservation and the skills and experience needed to balance natural ecosystems management (including wildlife conservation) with rural development and related goals. However, the FD does have a strong social forestry record of accomplishment -- and associated skills base -- to draw upon, and this provides some room for optimism with respect to its effort to develop a participatory approach to PA management. It is very important to build on this foundation as the co-management efforts move forward.

The scope of the policy and institutional development effort—when compared with the continuing loss of natural forest—lends credence to the five-year project timeframe. A deliberate approach will be needed to the identification of institutional options and choice of new and appropriate structures for government organizations and all associated partners. In the meantime, pilot activities can be initiated to serve as field laboratories for testing new management approaches and achieving localized conservation and development results. A suitable and representative range of demonstration sites thus will be needed, and these should be established in the first year if at all possible. An assessment of the general needs for capacity building also should be completed as soon as possible, though this will need to be updated every six months or so as the institutional picture becomes clearer. It also will not be necessary to fully define the national PA network until consensus has been reached on institutional and policy structures—probably in the second or third years. The fourth and fifth project years can be used to consolidate gains in the chosen field sites and to establish the national policy and institutional framework.

As national PA management policies and priorities are developed, they should be informed by sound environmental economic analysis. The economic values associated with sustainable management of PAs should be calculated as well as the benefits foregone from unsustainable management practices (using the pilot sites as the basis for developing methods acceptable within the country). This should include the identification of both market and non-market

values, though the valuation process need not be overly rigorous (“back of the envelope” estimates will still greatly assist and influence decision making). PA economics also should be used as the basis for developing sound approaches for financing management of these areas based on the values identified (including mechanisms to directly tap willingness to pay as well as the use of identified values to justify budgetary allocations).

Finally, the situation dictates a need for strong inter-agency and donor coordination. Although the institutional arrangements are still to be established, it is clear that many government agencies, non-governmental organizations, the media and other elements of civil society will need to be collaboratively engaged in this effort. The Asian Development Bank’s recent decision to suspend the ADB/GEF Sunderbans Conservation Project also has created an opportunity for the USAID project to exert donor leadership with respect to development of the national system of PAs including the need for strong accountability.

Opportunities for Active Learning from Asian Experience

A grand experiment is currently being conducted across Asia investigating a range of participatory approaches to the management of natural resources, including especially forests and protected areas. Such efforts are helping to shape new forms of collaboration among scientists, decision makers, and resource managers involving a nearly continuous flow of information, periodic evaluation and policy adjustment in an “adaptive management” framework. Since 1986 the Ford Foundation and the East-West Center have collaborated to document a large portion of this experience regarding the management of forests in Asia, as national governments have attempted to collaborate with local communities in designing win-win resource management scenarios. This has been done through a series of workshops organized by the East-West Center on “Community Management of Forestlands” and in follow-up workshops where participants have presented their conclusions to national and regional policy makers. The workshops also have provided an important venue for busy practitioners to take time to document their experience for wider analysis and sharing².

This program is currently winding down even as it seeks to transfer the capacity to host and facilitate future workshops to the Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC) at Kasetsart University in Bangkok, Thailand. A final round of field studies and an associated workshop is anticipated during 2003-2004, which may center on the subject of participatory approaches to protected areas management. Further dialogue with the East-West Center could yield a special opportunity for Bangladesh to gain access to relevant experience outside of the country and to participate in this program so that lessons from Bangladesh may also be shared with colleagues working on similar issues elsewhere in Asia.

There also is the possibility of organizing Asian study tours for Bangladeshi practitioners and policy makers so that they may see first hand the approaches being used under similar conditions in the region. Given the relevant experience in Indonesia with such approaches—and coupled with IRG’s strong presence in the country—this would seem an obvious candidate. There might also be good possibilities for organizing a useful study tour to Sri Lanka, especially if IRG ends up implementing the DENREMS project in that country.

² Note: The first part of this section draws directly from “Building Regional, National, and Local Capacities for Community-Based Management of Natural Resources in Asia: Program Description”, by Jefferson Fox and Krisnawati Suryanata in collaboration with Somsak Sukwong.

Practical Local Steps for Building Capacity for Co-Management

The Forest Department's extensive experience in social forestry provides an important starting point for local capacity building for co-management of PAs. Building on this experience, it is recommended that the FD also benefit from training and orientation and field visits, particularly with India.

in India, forest user groups are currently known as Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs). A variant of this is known as Eco-development Committee (EDC) in India. And it is this EDC structure that is the closest to co-management of PAs. The EDCs were formed for the first time in 1996 in West Bengal, for the reason that usufruct sharing envisaged in JFM is not possible in PAs. Under the EDC arrangement, the opportunity costs of the communities must be met outside forests. Co-management is conceived on a larger context where participation of all the stakeholders is essential with concomitant inputs. Some EDCs and JFMCs in India have been functioning in an almost identical manner, and fortunately, some of these are located in adjacent West Bengal. On the basis of these experiences, the Consultants recommend consideration of cross-visits to a number of EDCs in West Bengal to learn from these experiences.

Field visits to two sites in particular in West Bengal are suggested for the first year of the Project:

Nimti-Domohani Forest Protection Committee: This FPC is located in western fringe of Buxa Tiger Reserve under Kalchini block of Alipurduar subdivision of Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal, India. Located as it is next to the well-known Tiger Reserve, this FPC can provide useful feedback on how the co-management process has evolved.

Uttar-Dakshin Panialguri FPC: This FPC is located in East Damanpur Range of Buxa Tiger Reserve (West), about 10 km from Alipurduar in Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal, India. Jalpaiguri district is situated to the north of Bangladesh and is quite close, and thus should be possible to negotiate by bus. The added advantage of these sites is that they are Bengali speaking areas and culturally similar to Bangladesh. Such a trip would be comparatively inexpensive and therefore a large number of stakeholders could visit and interact with colleagues.

Longer term and more formal capacity building activities should also be undertaken so as to build the ranks of the FD for PA co-management. To this end, the Consultants recommended consideration of what is generally considered the premier training institute for wildlife management in India. The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehra Dun is adequately equipped to handle such training. The details of the facilities and courses available can be found on the web.

Additional Recommendations

A number of additional reforms were recommended by the Consultants, including the following:

- *Institutional structure of co-management committees:* In some cases, FD officials or Project staff may want the EDC or FPC equivalents at PA level to function as

loose. It is recommended, however, that the groups be formed into regular and formal committees, especially where they occur near PAs and are dependent on them. There should be an overseeing management committee with a fixed tenure, preferably with a provision for annual election. There should also be a provision for participation in the meetings and in decision making of all important stakeholders.

- *Building Broad Based Capacity at FD:* Training of senior officers and local stakeholders is always necessary, but without broad based and wide ranging training of Range Officers, a new venture such as co-management will not be taken on by the Department as a whole. So as to address both needs, the the FD and the Project may consider training at such places as the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy for the highest level officers and the state service training colleges and Rangers' colleges for the others. Since India is a part of the same subcontinent, the training would be quite relevant and costs will be responsible.
- *Internal Structure of the FD for PA Management:* The existing structure for wildlife management in Forest Department is not ideally conducive to launching an ambitious and novel project such as the CTFR, which would probably be a first effort of its kind in the sub-continent. It may be considered to make all the DFOs implementing the Project as declared Wildlife Wardens.
- *Networking with Key Indian Counterparts:* In addition to these recommendations, it may be considered to build networks with experienced institutions such as Kalpavriksh (directed by Dr. Ashish Kothari) and the Centre of Consultancy for Biosocial Advancement of the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation. This second institution is ideally placed -- since it is made up of former foresters - - to facilitate cross-visits to West Bengal.

Conclusions

Bangladesh is facing a daunting but exciting task as it seeks to establish a national network of parks and protected areas and associated policies, institutions, financial structures and field management approaches. Achieving the desired results will require the adoption of an over-riding adaptive management approach to both fieldwork and development of associated policies and institutions. As noted, it is something of a race against time given the heavy population and economic pressures facing the few remaining wild areas of the country. Although the Sundarbans reserve represents the country's only globally significant protected area, the stakes and potential benefits of success are still very high in global, regional, national and local terms.

ANNEX 1: Statements of Work for Dr. McCauley and Mr. Palit

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Statement of Work for Dr. McCauley

The Consultant will carry out the following activities during his assignment:

1. Conduct briefings to and discussion with the IRG institutional team members of the Project, to bring the IRG team to a greater level of familiarity with protected area co-management efforts in Asia;
2. Share experiences with key members of the Forest Department on the same issue of co-management of protected areas in Asia. On the 2nd or 3rd day of the assignment, the Consultant will make a presentation to key members of the Forest Department;
3. Develop and present institutional options for furthering progress toward development of a co-management model for Bangladesh; and
4. Identify options for exchanges and networking between Bangladesh stakeholders (inside and outside the Forest Department) and Asian stakeholders in the area of protected forest area co-management.

The Consultant will prepare a brief report highlighting the issues discussed and recommendations made, including recommendations concerning options for networking amongst forest co-management stakeholders. Included in this brief report will be recommended sites for the Project's first year training and networking opportunities.

Statement of Work for Mr. Palit

The Consultant will carry out the activities during his assignment:

1. Conduct briefings to and discussion with the IRG institutional team members of the Project, to bring the IRG team to a greater level of familiarity with protected area co-management efforts In India and the sub-region;
2. Share experiences with key members of the Forest Department on the same issue of co-management of protected areas in India and the subregion. On the 2nd or 3rd day of the assignment, the Consultant will make a presentation to key members of the Forest Department;
3. Develop and present institutional options for furthering progress toward development of a co-management model for Bangladesh; and
4. Identify options for exchanges and networking between Bangladesh stakeholders (inside and outside the Forest Department) and Indian stakeholders in the area of protected forest area co-management.

**ANNEX 2: PowerPoint Presentation on "Co-Management of Protected Areas:
Experience from Asia"**

